

The Ne wsletter of the African Burial Ground Project

UPDATE

Fall 2000

Vol. 3 No. 4

Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048. Tel. (212) 432-5707, Fax (212) 432-5920. Please send all e-mail inquiries to nyabg@worldnet.att.net. Update provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

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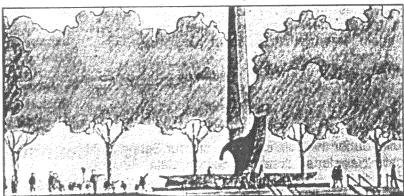
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In This Issue...

Howard University Lab Report3
Volunteer Profile5
GSA Update8
Community Voices9
Fall Reading List10
and more!

Carrying on the Legacy

Donna Harden-Cole



Architectural rendering of Triumph of the Human Spirit Photo courtesy: Lorenzo Pace

nspired by an African elder's woodcarving of the Last Supper, renowned artist, Dr. Lorenzo Pace has been producing impressive works of art since the 1970's. An abstractionist, Pace uses a variety of materials and mediums in his designs including performance art to convey the complexities of humanity. Themes regarding Africana culture, ritual, symbolism and religion are prevalent among his work. He dares to interject symbols of diversity, acceptance, change and inclusion. An avid traveler of Africa, Asia and Europe, his creations have evolved from a multiplicity of cultural sources choosing even to utilize objects collected from the paucity of the streets. The materials can range from woven straw or seaweed to enormous sheets of metal, or blocks of granite.

Dr. Pace's latest work is entitled Triumph of the Human Spirit. Commissioned in 1993. Pace was selected from over 400 applicants by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Parks Department to create a public monument at Foley Square Park in lower Manhattan. Dr. Pace was chosen to design this piece to commemorate the nearby historic African Burial Ground site where the U. S. General Services Administration, during building construction, recovered hundreds of human remains in 1991.

(Continued on page 7)

"For three centuries there has been no permanent recognition of the historical contributions of Africans to New York -- this world class city. Triumph of the Human Spirit, I trust, is just a wonderful beginning to recognize our ancestors and our children." -- S.D. Wilson (2000)

+++ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR +++

Greetings From the First Lady

Thank you for the African Burial Ground Press Kit. I want you to know that your support means a great deal to me. Please accept my apology for the delay in responding to your message. The amount of mail that I have received has meant that I have been unable to respond as promptly as I would prefer.

Your continued support will be invaluable to the President as he and his Administration continue to work toward meaningful and lasting change. Thank you again for remembering me in this special way.

Sincerely yours, Hillary Rodham Clinton Washington, D.C.

Public Recognition...

Thank you for the bulk shipment of your Spring 2000 Update Newsletter donated for our Gala Reunion, held at Historic Gardner's Basin in Atlantic City, N.J.

101 Women Plus enjoyed the day's events filled with music and entertainment, food and rekindled friendships. The Update was included in our souvenir tote bag and was very much appreciated by all who attended. Our grateful thanks to you again for sending this excellent educational tool as your contribution to making this a "memorable reunion."

Sincerely, Richlyn D. Goddard Pres., One Hundred and One Women Plus Atlantic City, N.J.

On behalf of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society, Jean Sampson-Scott Greater New York Chapter's Midwest Committee, thank you so much for making our visit to the African Burial Ground and 290 Broadway the highlight of our day.

Although our tour was delayed, you were timely, thoughtful, enthusiastic and very informative. Many of the 40 + folks on our tour had never visited the African Burial Ground and only a few of us had ever seen the beauty inside 290 Broadway.

All best wishes, Elizabeth Rankin-Fulcher Chair, Midwest Committee Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Brooklyn, N.Y. On behalf of the Director of Training and the Commanding Officer of the New York City Police Academy, I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff at the African Burial Ground for the success of the Recruit Cultural Field Trip project. Ms. Donna Harden-Cole was especially instrumental and deserving of our gratitude.

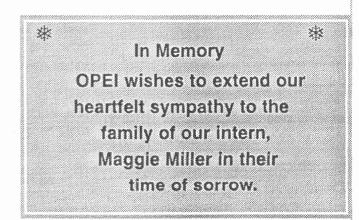
In an ongoing effort to raise the consciousness of our student officers, your presentation proved to be an extraordinary learning experience and one which I am sure changed them in some way. Thank you for your warmth, graciousness, and hospitality and I look forward to an ongoing partnership with you and the African Burial Ground Project, as we continue to be agents of change.

Sincerely, Grace Telesco, Lieutenant Chairperson Behavioral Science Dept. Police Academy The City of N.Y. Police Dept.

Letter from an OPEI Intern

I want to thank each and every one of you for making this internship experience one that has given me the courage and strength to move on further. All of you are wonderful people to work with. I feel sad that I am leaving now, but I am optimistic knowing that I might meet other people like you with whom I feel very comfortable. I hope we keep in touch, I will surely visit you.

Sincerely, Lidija Vrabac Queens, N.Y.



NOTES FROM THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY LABORATORY

NO DNA TESTING SERVICE AVAILABLE

Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D.

Recent media reports have reflected some confusion about the existence of a Howard University service that promises to help living African Americans find their African family roots using DNA tests. This is an African Burial Ground idea, but we are not offering the alleged service for living African Americans. Our project is, however, developing a database that should make DNA evidence useful for just this kind of service in the future. The first step in which we are now engaged is the creation of a database for assessing the cultural roots of the ancestors buried at the site in New York, for which much work remains to be done.

We discovered how to create an accurate comparative database by solving the technical problems encountered early in our research. The anticipated funding for which the community has fought will allow us to carry out those solutions. The main problem is that the DNA samples currently available from Africa are representative of only a small proportion of the complex African nations that contributed to the Transatlantic trade in human captives. The world's geneticists had not previously been much interested in the origins of the African diaspora and so tended to collect data only

on simpler African societies who were little involved in trade, but which geneticists thought of as useful for the study of evolution.

The press has continued to stir the issue up.

DNA studies seem to be the 'flavor of the month'.............................."

Some of the problems we have identified derive from our use of historical and archaeological data as a test for the plausibility of our genetic data. For example, according to the project's historians, a large proportion of the Africans brought to the Americas came from the Congo-Angola region, However, there are no available DNA samples of people from this region except for so called. "Pygmies" who were not involved in the slave trade. Until we get DNA samples of people

from the major societies of this region, it will not be possible to show that any African American has roots there.

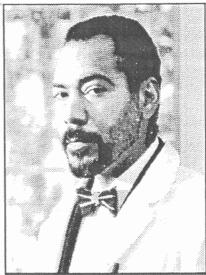
If someone with Congo-Angola origins were tested today the DNA tests would show a likely match with a population in the existing database whose DNA are similar to a particular Congo-Angola people. But it would not be a population to which the individual being tested is actually related. So, any sort of estimate of the origins of African Americans cannot give accurate results until a database representing the peoples whom historians have identified as our ancestors is more complete.

According to a flurry of press releases earlier this year, Dr. Rick Kittles, a former researcher with the African Burial Ground Project, attempted to launch a DNA service at Howard University using the incomplete database which had been in development. It appears that this premature service was quickly shut down in response to my inquiries with Howard University officials. (Some Howard officials say that the service was never formally started up).

The press has continued to stir the issue up. DNA studies seem



Dr. Fatimah Jackson is the Associate Director for Genetics of the African Burial Ground Project and a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland. Photo credit: S.D. Willson



Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Scientific Project Director and a Professor of Physical Anthropology at Howard University, Wash., DC Photo credit: Jeffrey John Fearing

reputation, while our other researchers are taking the necessary time to do a proper job.

The children's book entitled, Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence by Joyce Hansen and Gary McGowan is an example of an unapproved and unauthorized publication which does not represent the work of the African Burial Ground Project. Mr. McGowan did, however, use project resources for this unfortunate book when he had been employed to conserve artifacts.



to be the 'flavor of the month,' with news articles piggy backing on one another long after the removal of Dr. Kittles' WEB page advertising the service at Howard. Many people have called my office to ask about having their DNA tested. The answer has been (and is) that such a service does not yet exist.

Dr. Fatimah Jackson is the Associate Director for Genetics of the African Burial Ground Project and a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland. Dr. Jackson, Dr. Okay Adoche of Howard University Hospital, and I are working with several key African embassies on collaborative projects that should produce the needed database.

Once funds are available this work will be completed for use on the African Burial Ground skeletal remains. Then, our database (including Congo-Angola and other missing com-

parative samples) will be made available to the public.

We think we are on to just what will be needed for an accurate service, when the time is right. It is unfortunate that when Dr. Kittles left our project he tried to carry on with this idea by himself (for a fee) without having what was really required to carry it out.

The fact that the funding, and therefore the DNA work, of our project has been held up by the GSA has caused our researchers to stop and wait while others take their opportunity.

This is not the first time such problems have occurred, but they have fortunately been very rare for our project. For example, all project researchers have agreed not to publish anything about the African Burial Ground without permission and authorization from the directors. This rule is intended to prevent incompetent and erroneous works from trading on the project's

CITATIONS

Listed below are just a few of the many articles which feature stories concerning the controversy outlined by Dr. Blakey. Newpaper, magazine and on-line articles are available for review at OPEI's archival library by appointment only: (212) 432-5707.

"DNA Offers Link to Black History: Promise in Tracing African American Ancestry Before Slavery" by C. Greenberg N.Y. Times, August 28, 2000.

"DNA Helps Re-Connect Bonds Severed by Slave Trade" by Tatsha Robertson. <u>National</u> <u>Geographic.Com.</u> July 13, 2000.

"Controversy Brews Over DNA Testing Plan: An Interview with Rick Kittles." <u>Africana.Com</u>, July 12, 2000.

"DNA Helps Find African Roots: Howard University's Genetic Match People With Ancestors." by Greg Wright, Gannet News Service April 5, 2000.

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT VOLUNTEER

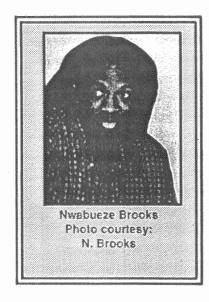


Volunteer Profile: Nwabueze Brooks

By Kahlil Shaw

Nwabueze Brooks is currently a social worker for the Essex County Division in Newark, New Jersey and is also a student of history and Africana studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Mr. Brooks has been a long time supporter and promoter of the landmark African Burial Ground (ABG). He first heard about the ABG in 1991 when he was on an Old New York Historic Walking Tour with Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, who is now the Director of The Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI). At that time, construction had only just begun. Mr. Brooks knew then that the ABG was a worthy cause.

Although he has a very busy schedule, Brooks still finds time to work diligently with the ABG worldwide public education efforts. For example, he distributes the Update Newsletter, brochures and other OPEI education materials. He also invites family, friends and other people he comes in contact with to the various OPEI events and functions. As it is not always easy to talk to people you do not know, sharing information about the



African Burial Ground can become a great conversation piece to bring people together.

When talking to Mr. Brooks, you get a strong sense that his family has had a powerful influence in his life and he refers to them with great reverence. For instance, Iseanyi Brooks, Nwabueze's father, worked for the Nigerian Consulate in the early 1960's at the time Nigeria sought to gain its independence from colonial rule. During his father's travels, he has met and developed lasting friendships with well known figures such as former Light Heavyweight Boxing Champion, Dick Tiger and world famous musician. Babatunde Olatunii.

Having this kind of background, Brooks developed a great interest in, and became a student of African history. He is an avid reader, researcher and collector of various books on the subject. When Mr. Brooks learned of the OPEI Volunteer Program, he saw it as a great opportunity to get involved. He explained, "As a volunteer, I feel I am a part of a living history as opposed to gaining information about African American history only through books. All in all, Mr. Brooks makes himself available in whatever capacity he is needed for the project.

"The African Burial Ground has expanded my approach to history," says Brooks. He feels he has greatly added to his knowledge on the subject by including the anthropological and archaeological aspects of African American history. Although Mr. Brooks has been a volunteer for some time now, he feels his work related to the project is not yet done. He concluded, "I really would like to see the project get the funding that it needs. Also, it would be nice to see some new faces involved [in terms of getting more volunteers to join.]"

Well, we say thank you to Nwabueze Brooks and applaud his input and diligent support of the ABG. We encourage him to continue his efforts because they are much appreciated. Sankofa!



African Burial Ground Update

Compiled by Donna Harden-Cole and Janet Dees



From left to right: Kahlil Shaw, Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, Shaniqua Maxwell and Charris Walker Photo credit: Janet Dees

OPEI attends the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's (CBCF) 30th Annual Legislative Conference in Washington D. C. Members of the OPEI staff attended the CBCF's 30th Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. from September 13-16, 2000. The conference is an annual event sponsored by the CBCF to highlight issues relevant to African Americans and the constituents of members of the Congressional Black Caucus. It also provides a showcase for businesses, non-profit and governmental organizations offering services to these communities.

At the conference OPEI distributed material about the NY African Burial Ground to over 500 people including representatives from other exhibiting organizations, federal, state and local governments.

OPEI would like to wish our former Associate Editor, Janet Dees well in her new endeavors. Replacing her will be Donna Harden-Cole an OPEI Public Educator. Having been with the African Burial Ground Project from its inception, she brings a wealth of experience to the role of Associate Editor including her extensive organization of the OPEI Volunteer Program and in her capacity as Media Coordinator.

Ground Project. Since the closure of the African Burial Ground Bio-Anthropological and Archaeological labs in February, 2000 (due to an absence of funding from the General Services Administration), there has been increasing concern among members of the community regarding the welfare of the African Burial Ground Project. Many people are asking what they can do to ensure the timely completion of the project research and scientific analysis.

Representative Charles Rangel of New York (D) has become one of the primary congressional advocates for the African Burial Ground. Concerned citizens can write Congressman Rangel to express their concern and show their support for the project:

Representative Charles Rangel 2354 Rayburn House Office Building Washington D. C. 20515 (202) 225- 4365

The Friends of the African Burial Ground is a private advocacy organization for the African Burial Ground Project. Their mission is to develop strategies to monitor and ensure the project's success. They can be contacted at:

Ayo Harrington, Chair Friends of the African Burial Ground 336 East 4th Street, Suite 2B New York, NY 10009 212-477-2019 Email: doyo@prodigy.net

***** * *

In Memoriam

Our Prayers and condolences are with

Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson & Family in loving memory of her mother, the late Mrs. Annie Ethel Bennett of Bessemer, Alabama

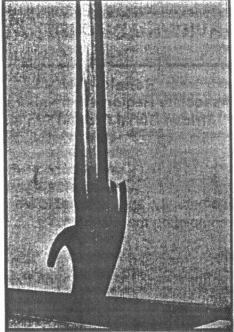
Aug. 21, 1936 - Oct. 10, 2000

"Carrying on the Legacy" (Cont. from page 1)

"Triumph", the third design submitted for approval, is a massive 300 ton ebony sculpture made of granite. "This is an abstract representation of an antelope mask worn by tribesmen in Mali, Africa and mounted atop an Indian canoe," says Dr. Pace as reported by New York Times writer, Robin Finn who called "Triumph" Pace's masterpiece in a September 27, 2000 article. The mask is known as a Chi Wara. The canoe pays homage to the North American Natives who used them, as well as the immigrants and enslaved Africans who were brought to America on ships, reports Josh Rogers of the Downtown Express.

Completed and delivered to Foley Square Park nearly 9 months ago, city officials only recently selected October 12, 2000 as the date set for the unveiling. "There was some scheduling concerns of Parks Commissioner, Henry Stern, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Senator Daniel P. Moynihan to consider regarding the date" says Dr. Pace.

Apparently, October 12, 2000 was the most recent date that would fit all three officials' schedules. Dr. Pace, however, did not believe October 12th to be an appropriate date for the unveiling nor was he asked to be involved in the decision of planning the date for the unveiling. "Stern is not being sensitive to the African-American community," says Dr. Pace. His objections were directed towards the particulars of the date as it is the formal day of celebration for the 500 plus years' anniversary of Christopher Columbus' "discovery of America". "He was the one



TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT
Photo courtesy: Lorenzo Pace

who started it all. He helped pave the way for the transatlantic enslavement of Africans," says Pace. In keeping with his sentiments, Pace did not appear at the October 12th unveiling.

In lieu of the October 12th date. Pace orchestrated the collaborative efforts of Peggy King-Jorde, Executive Director of Memorialization for the African Burial Ground and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, Director of the OPEI to arrange October 19th as a more appropriate date for the community to participate in a dedication. Community leaders such as New York State Senator David Paterson, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, Dr. Adelaide Sandford. Rev. Calvin Butts, Councilman Bill Perkins, Rev. Wendell Foster and many others attended the event on the 19th. "It can rot from the top, but it's got to be respected," says Pace in the Downtown Express

"Triumph's" purpose, lest we forget, is to pay respect to the ances-

tors. To underscore that effort, Pace has selflessly chosen to enshrine a precious, family heirloom within the sculpture. Selected was the palm size padlock and key that secured the shackles of his great, great, grandfather, Steve Pace. The onerous lock was entrusted to Dr. Pace by his uncle, who chose him as the "keeper of the lock", when his father passed away in 1991. "By embedding the lock and key in the sculpture, this is my way of carrying on the legacy," says Pace. The heirloom is a representation of freedom from the rigors of enslavement painstakingly endured by his ancestor just a few miles outside of Tuskeegee, Alabama, Pace has just completed a children's book about the lock entitled, Jalani and the Lock.

The artist, who has been the Director of the Montclair State University Art Galleries in New Jersey since 1988, speaks of Triumph of the Human Spirit as a hopeful cynosure for racial healing. During his interview with Rogers, Dr. Pace offered this summation for the masterpiece. "It can be a worldwide trend that people can come together, drop our ethnicity, drop our race, drop our politics and prove we can deal with each other as human beings." Peace.



ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?

Please submit your name and/or corrections to OPEI
Rm. 239,
New York, New York 10048
Tel. (212) 432-5707,
Fax (212) 432-5920

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION UPDATE

Ronald Law Associate Regional Administrator African Burial Ground Project

Dear Friends:

Over the past few months the General Services Administration has been working to respond to a request from the Descendent Community for the immediate reinterment of the 408 ancestral skeletal remains. There is no need to debate the fact that the ancestral remains have been out of the ground far too long. GSA believes that the schedule developed previously, projecting reinterment in two years is no longer acceptable to the community at-large, or to the agency. Therefore a reexamination of the current schedules was required, and was undertaken this year.

The review of the request took longer than expected, because of the numerous components and the projects' complexities. While working to respond to the Descendants requests, it became apparent that cost was a factor for accelerating this proiect. Other factors that had to be considered in determining a response included: logistical issues; procurement issues; engineering concerns; consensus from our partners at the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, New York City Landmarks and the constituent

community, and a timetable for completing the research.

Congressman Rangel has championed the cause of the African Burial Ground Project in Congress, but the House of Representatives did not agree to provide appropriated funds. As a result, GSA will obtain funding from the Federal Financing Bank to support the completion of the project. With this new funding, additional resources will be available to complete a world class memorial for the African Burial Ground as expeditiously as possible.

Our goal is to develop a timetable that takes into account the wishes of the Descendent Community and will also be acceptable to our Federal and City partners. The timetable will include a schedule for reinterment and the attendant ceremony, memorialization, and a completion date for the Interpretive Center. A public meeting will be held to announce these new schedules as soon as they are made final.

It should be noted that since the selection of IDI Construction as the design firm for the Interpretive Center, they have been

working to complete the first phase of construction design. In this stage IDI has to review all of the information and research material which has been gathered for the project.

Unfortunately, the contract with Howard University is currently in default and Dr. Michael Blakey; the Principal Investigator has declined requests to meet with IDI. GSA hopes to resolve this issue so IDI may finish its work and proceed with the task of building the Interpretive Center.

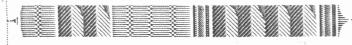
GSA is confident that all stakeholders associated with the ABG will work collaboratively in the weeks and months ahead so that this long delayed and important project shows real progress in the very near future.



For Information concerning GSA's next Public Forum or other inquiries, write to:

General Services Administration 26 Federal Plaza, New York, NY 10278 or call (212) 264-4100

COMMUNITY VOICES



Compiled by Shaniqua Maxwell and Selma Hernandez

We recently asked members of the community what they felt was the significance of the permanent monument, "Triumph of the Human Spirit" installed in the newly renovated Foley Square Park?

Miriam Francis Sculptor & Community Activist

"Triumph of the Human Spirit" is magnificent. This 60 foot tall Chi Wara sculpture uplifted my spirit to be able to acknowledge my ancestors through this grand and visible art form. Triumph represents one of the many integral parts of our story. What an honor, what a privilege, what a remembrance! I am thankful for the day.

Fred Laverpool, President Bragging About Brooklyn

Lorenzo Pace's sculpture "Triumph of the Human Spirit" is a 5 story, 300-ton tribute to the Middle Passage. I am deeply impressed, reverently honored and graciously blessed to have participated in the community unveiling on October 19th. I am thoughtfully grateful that Mr. Pace so chose to honor my ancestors and my African American history in this way. Our ancestors endured against all odds. The recognition of their sacrifices is symbolized by such an enormous, beautiful work of art situated so very close to the sacred, African Burial Ground, Also, "Triumph" stands where the former Collect Pond was located near which such tragedies as the slave revolt of the 1820's occurred. Mr. Pace's sculpture looms as a recognizable and honorable monument against the atrocities of humanity. I remain graciously honored and deeply blessed to have witnessed the community's unveiling of this gigantic tribute.

Lottie Malone Community Activist

I felt so divinely fortunate to have attended the unveiling of the community's dedication program of Brother Lorenzo Pace's sculpture, "Triumph of the Human Spirit." It was a pleasure to have witnessed the honoring of our ancestors who are buried so close to the

sculpture at the African Burial Ground site. I wish the impossible wish, that every African could visit the sculpture. I salute the dedicated staff of the African Burial Ground Memorialization Project and the dedication program. The program truly represented our community. The New York Boys Choir performed a wonderful, hip-hop selection that was hailed by the crowd.

Rev. Herbert Daughtry Pastor, House of the Lord Church

This is a creative effort to underscore the events that resulted from the hardships of the Middle Passage. "Triumph of the Human Spirit" is a sculpture that conveys a spirit of unity. It is significant because Dr. Pace in representing our people, in the quest to show our suffering, still reaches out to touch others. This is consistent with our history. Africans have always been inclusive of others. For example, after the Civil War, our ancestors did not go after the enslaver. Instead they merely sought to be recognized as full citizens with equal rights.



Announcement

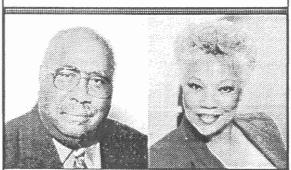


Photo courtesy: Joysetta Pearse

In the Summer 2000 issue of the *Update Newsletter* we featured a volunteer profile that detailed the ongoing genealogy research conducted by **Julius and Joysetta**Pearse. As a result of numerous requests, we are republishing their contact information:

African Atlantic Genealogical Society
60 Meister Boulevard
Freeport, NY 11520-5938
516-867-7480

OPEI'S FALL 2000 READING LIST

Compiled by Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Berry, Mary Frances. Black
Resistance, White Law: A History of
Constitutional Racism in America. NY:
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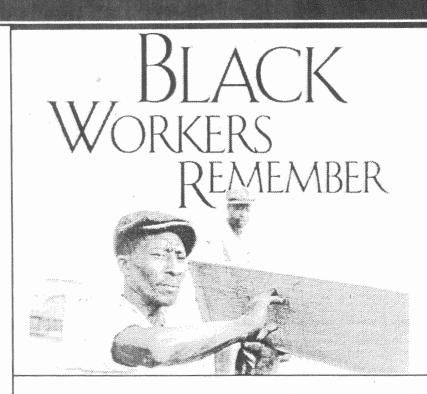
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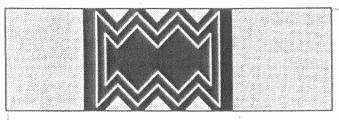
OPEI Mini-Calendar of Saturday Events *

Kwanzaa Film Festival & Site Tour Sat., Dec. 30, 2000 Showing will include Sankofa (125 min.), Feel It In My Bones (25 min) and The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery (1 hr.)

* Reservations are needed for all events. Events are subject to change or cancellation. Please call to confirm time and locations @ (212) 432-5707.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF UPDATE:

- Media Representations (Part 3 of 5)
- ▼ OPEI 2001 Events Calendar
- ▼ GSA Project Update



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ADDRESS

